



An Roinn Forbartha  
Tuaithe agus Pobail  
Department of Rural and  
Community Development



Tionscadal Éireann  
Project Ireland  
2040

Ár dTodhchaí  
Tuaithe  
Our Rural  
Future



# Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme

## 2023 Scheme Outline



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# 1. Strategic Context

## Our Rural Future

The Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS) supports the development of new outdoor recreational infrastructure and the necessary repair, enhancement or promotion of existing outdoor recreation infrastructure in countryside areas across Ireland. The Scheme is funded under “Our Rural Future” which specifically prioritises the growing outdoor activity tourism sector as part of a long-term vision for a vibrant and sustainable rural Ireland.

The policy acknowledges that outdoor recreation plays a key role in achieving the ambition for rural Ireland to be a destination of choice for outdoor activities and adventure tourism. The increase in tourism will provide opportunities for employment growth in rural areas through local businesses and entrepreneurs using the tourism assets in their area in a sustainable way to support recreational activities such as walking, cycling and canoeing.

## Embracing Ireland’s Outdoors

Launched in November 2022, *Embracing Ireland’s Outdoors*, the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023 - 2027 is set to shape the future of outdoor recreation over the next five years. The Strategy will lead, guide and facilitate the sustainable development and management of outdoor recreation in the medium term. The Strategy aims to increase the number of people active in the outdoors, especially young people and under-represented groups, and to foster a greater understanding of how to enjoy the outdoors responsibly.

The Strategy also aims to protect our landscapes, habitats and built heritage by better planning where and how we develop outdoor recreation infrastructure by providing guidance on the process and practices for developing outdoor recreation infrastructure in a sustainable fashion. This will lead to enhanced protection of the environment and will be in keeping with best practice management of landscape and habitats. This emphasis on developing outdoor recreation infrastructure in a careful and sustainable manner is reflected throughout the ORIS scheme outline in Chapter 2.

Given the increase in visitor numbers to many of our most popular outdoor recreation sites, the Strategy also envisages developing visitor management approaches, which can be tailored for the needs of each site in order to prevent adverse impacts to the surrounding environment. It also aims to improve how recreation and access is managed in upland areas and addresses the impact of increased recreational use on some of our most iconic mountain ranges.

It is essential that all projects applied for under ORIS are consistent with *Embracing Ireland’s Outdoors*.

The Strategy has identified 6 interdependent strategic objectives:-

<b>Leadership</b>	To create a more coordinated, cohesive approach at national and county level to ensure best use of our resources
<b>Environment</b>	To protect the environment through better planning and development of outdoor recreation, in keeping with best practice management of landscape and habitats
<b>Access</b>	To protect and improve access to the outdoors, for the benefit of all
<b>Opportunities</b>	To increase and support the number of people active in the outdoors, especially young people and under-represented groups
<b>Awareness</b>	To create awareness of our outdoor recreation opportunities and how to enjoy them responsibly
<b>Expertise</b>	To improve the knowledge, skills and expertise of stakeholders and partners

### **Island Policy**

Our coastal islands are an integral part of the State’s cultural and natural heritage. In line with commitments made in **Our Rural Future**, the Department is finalising a new ten year policy on the Islands accompanied by a 3 year Action Plan, to present to Government for approval in the coming weeks. As part of the policy it is proposed that additional funding opportunities will be afforded to island communities. In this regard, an additional islands specific Project Development Measure application will be accepted from local authorities with inhabited coastal islands. These measures are set out in Chapter 3.

### **Just Transition**

In December 2022 the Government allocated €68 million to Fáilte Ireland to implement a Regenerative Tourism & Placemaking Scheme for Ireland’s Midlands. Counties Laois, Westmeath, Offaly, Longford, Roscommon, Galway, Tipperary and Kildare are set to benefit from specific Just Transition funding. The focus of this funding is to provide new employment opportunities for workers and communities that were heavily dependent on peat by diversifying the local economy, which will include new opportunities for tourism.

One of the strands includes Trail Development. In that context, applicants proposing trail development projects within this “Just Transition” territory should first engage with the Fáilte Ireland’s Just Transition Project Team prior to prioritising the projects under ORIS.

This is to ensure consistency around the development of new outdoor recreation infrastructure in line with Embracing Ireland Outdoors. The team will be in a position to closely examine proposals and ensure alignment with Just Transition principles. The Just Transition Team may be contacted at [Marie.Healy@failteireland.ie](mailto:Marie.Healy@failteireland.ie).

ORIS applications located within the Just Transition territory may be prioritised by local authorities. **Such applications, however, will not be assessed under ORIS unless prior engagement with the Just Transition Team has occurred.**

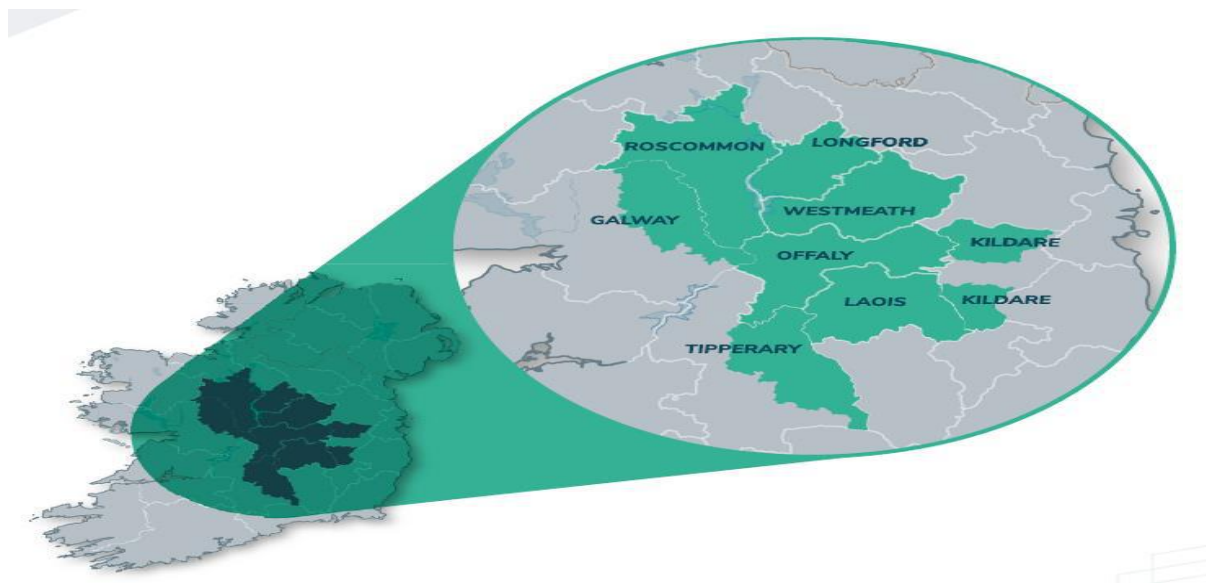


Figure 1 Just Transition Territory source: <https://eufunds.ie/home/our-funds/just-transition-fund/>

## 2. ORIS 2023 Scheme Focus

In line with [Embracing Ireland's Outdoors](#), outdoor recreation is defined as activities that take place in the natural environment, such as walking, canoeing, mountain biking, orienteering and wild swimming. It does not include activities that take place outdoors on confined courses or pitches (such as golf, football, and show-jumping) or motorised activities (such as quads/scramblers). As a consequence such activities are not eligible for funding under ORIS. Further detail on the definition can be found in the Strategy.

A list of eligible activities is detailed below, however it should be noted that this list is not exhaustive:-

		
<b>Land-Based</b>	<b>Water-Based</b>	<b>Air-Based</b>
Walking	Canoeing/Kayaking	Paragliding
Hillwalking/Hiking	Rowing	Hang-gliding
Leisure cycling	Wild swimming	
Mountain biking	Surfing	
Horse riding	Coasteering	
Running	Wind surfing/Kite surfing	
Orienteering	Sailing	
Bouldering, Scrambling, Rockclimbing, Mountaineering	Diving	
Caving	Angling	
Play in nature	Stand Up Paddleboarding	
<b>Passive enjoyment of the outdoors</b>		

The focus of ORIS is to support outdoor recreational infrastructure in countryside areas across Ireland that not only provides an outlet for the communities in which they are situated but that also delivers added value from a tourism perspective.

Projects typically funded by ORIS include walkways, cycleways, blueways, water and cycle trails, mountain access routes, bridleways, and open water amenities at bogs, rivers, lakes and beaches, including tidal pools.

In respect of trails and cycleways and in line with *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors* it is proposed that the Scheme will give equal priority to upgrades and improvement of existing routes (to ensure a high standard of trails is maintained) as to the development of new trails. Where an application relates to

upgrades to a trail or enhancing an existing trail, focus should be on bringing the trail up the standard suitable for inclusion on the [Sport Ireland National Trails Register](#).

Projects which position rural areas to avail of economic opportunities and add value to the tourism sector are encouraged. In particular, projects that can display a specific tourism or other sectoral impact that may aid economic development.

### **Collaboration & Engagement with Local Communities**

Early engagement, with the local community is vital to the success of a project. The scheme will prioritise projects which have evidence of strong community engagement. Applicants should ensure that in advance of the submission of an application that the local community has been consulted and their feedback taken on board. It is important that the adoption of such a collaborative approach is evidenced in the application. Where possible, projects should demonstrate engagement with the relevant Rural Recreation Officer (see [here](#)) and Town Regeneration Officers, as appropriate.

### **Strategic Collaborative Projects**

The Department will prioritise projects of scale from two or more local authorities/local development companies working together. Such projects should be submitted as separate applications and will be assessed as such. If projects are part of a cross county partnership please ensure that this is clearly stated in the application in order for the Department to consider same.

### **Post-Construction Maintenance**

It is clear from the development of *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors* that there is a need for continued investment in the maintenance of existing outdoor recreation infrastructure. An action under the Strategy includes the requirement for funding for asset renewal and maintenance of existing trails. In this regard, ORIS will provide funding for such works.

### **Accessibility & Inclusion**

Projects that result in improved access to recreational facilities for those with disabilities and older people are actively encouraged and will be prioritised. Infrastructure funded under ORIS should be in line with the [Universal Design Principles](#) and as far as practicable, be accessible to all.

Disability friendly and Age friendly measures should be incorporated into the overall design and layout of projects where practical. These measures should include the provision of appropriate information, suitable path surfaces and seating at appropriate intervals. Active Disability Ireland (formerly Cara)



has developed an extensive range of guidance for the development of outdoor recreation infrastructure. Applicants should refer to these resources when they are developing their applications.

### **Planning Permission**

Commencing in 2023, in respect of Measures 1, 2 & 3, planning permission (if required) must be obtained in advance of submission of applications. If the project has not yet secured planning permission, the submission of an application should be postponed. Alternatively, the Project Development Measure (PDM) might be considered. The PDM funds the detailed development of projects through detailed planning, design and preparation for procurement. This is with a view to preparing an application under a future round of Measure 2 or 3.

### **Appropriate Assessment Screening**

Appropriate Assessment Screening is required where a project (requiring planning permission) is located in, or may potentially impact on, a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) or Special Protection Area (SPA). If significant effects cannot be excluded, a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) will be required in order for the project to proceed. Further guidance on screening for appropriate assessment is available [here](#).

### **Activities Requiring Consent (ARC)**

Proposals impacting on a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) or Special Protection Area (SPA) which fall under Activities Requiring Consent ARCs - may require consent from the NPWS e.g. ARC-09 Construction or alteration of tracks, paths, roads, bridges, culverts or access routes. Further details are available [here](#).

The PDM measure might also be an appropriate funding mechanism where projects are located in sensitive nature conservation areas.

### **Environmental Considerations**

#### **Rain-Water Management**

Where relevant and if possible, applications should build on the design principles set out in the interim guidance document [Nature-based Solutions to the Management of Rainwater and Surface Water Runoff in Urban Areas](#), as produced by the local authority Waters Programme and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

## **Climate Action**

The Climate Action Plan 2023 sets out how Ireland can accelerate the actions that are required to respond to the climate crisis, putting climate solutions at the centre of Ireland's social and economic development. It sets out a roadmap for taking decisive action to halve our emissions by 2030 and reach net zero no later than 2050.

As part of the Department's commitment to the Climate Action Plan 2023, applicants will be required to identify, where appropriate, how a proportion of the funding sought will be used to support climate action or biodiversity measures e.g. tree/hedgerow planting on trails. It is imperative that projects do not have a negative environmental impact and, where possible, they involve measures which enhance the biodiversity of the area in question or introduce measures that support Climate Action.

Project applications should seek to enhance biodiversity and avoid or minimise loss of existing local habitats and wildlife corridors. Existing trees, hedgerows and watercourses should be retained and planting should comprise native and pollinator-friendly species, consistent with National Pollinator Plan. Nature-based solutions should be incorporated into design at an early stage. Examples include: SuDS (Sustainable Drainage Systems), permeable paving, swales, basins, and ponds to support local biodiversity and mitigate potentially harmful effects of development.

## **Written Consent- Coillte/ NPWS**

In an instance where a project traverses Coillte/NPWS lands, a letter of consent/support should be submitted along with the completed application form. Please note that requests to Coillte can be submitted via their recreation proposal form (see [here](#)). A list of relevant project applications will be shared with Coillte for review.

## **Greenways**

The Department of Transport sets out the Government's priorities in relation to the funding of greenways in Ireland. It is not the intention of ORIS to supplement or supplant this strategy by funding regional or national greenways i.e. those greenways that are over 20km in length. Greenway projects funded under ORIS must be of a local nature and not exceed 20km (all phases).

Where a project application relates to a phase of a greenway, and the overall planned greenway exceeds 20km, this project should not be applied for under ORIS as funding is available under Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII). Local extensions or local spurs off those greenways may be considered for funding under ORIS. The development of infrastructure to link a rural town or village to a greenway may also be considered.

## **Blueways**

Applicants seeking funding for existing Blueways or projects which intend using the “Blueway” brand. A Blueway is defined as “ a network of approved and branded multi-activity recreational trails and sites, based on, and closely linked to the water, together with providers facilitating access to activities and experiences.” Examples could include kayaking, stand up paddle boarding or walking/ cycling adjacent to water.

Applicants submitting a projects to create a new Blueway should engage in the Blueway accreditation process. Completed applications must be accompanied by letter of supports from both the Blueway Accreditation Inspector and at least 2 activity providers operating locally. The Blueway brand may not be used if a project has not engaged with or sought accredited under the Blueway accreditation process. For further information please refer to the [Blueways Ireland – Blueway Management & Development Guide](#). Applications which are water based but not accredited or intending to apply for accreditation as a Blueway may still be considered.

## **Upland Areas**

Projects involving upland areas should adhere to the [Helping the Hills - Guiding Principles for the Management of Path Erosion in Upland Areas](#). Any works to upland areas should have appropriate supervision by a qualified person/s party.

## **Best Practice**

All works should be carried out in line with best practice as per the following guidelines and toolkits:

- [Trail Development | Sport Ireland](#)
- [Blueways Ireland – Blueway Management & Development Guide](#)
- [Helping the Hills - Guiding Principles for the Management of Path Erosion in Upland Areas](#)
- [The Great Outdoors – Accessibility | Active Disability Ireland](#)
- [Leave No Trace Resources](#)
- [Fáilte Ireland - Greenway Visitor Experience and Interpretation Toolkit](#)
- [Nature-based Solutions to the Management of Rainwater and Surface Water Runoff in Urban Areas](#)

### **Compliance with the Official Languages Act**

All signage must comply with the Official Languages Acts 2003 and 2021 regarding the use of the Irish language, i.e. all text must be in Irish and English, or in Irish only. This applies whether permanent or temporary, indoor or outdoor, directional or promotional, new or replacement signage, etc. Guidance in this regard is available from [An Coimisinéir Teanga](#).

Therefore it is essential that all interpretative signage, electronic signs, information leaflets, plaques and advertisements are bilingual i.e. in Irish and English, or in Irish only.

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## 3. Scheme Measures

The Scheme will be delivered under four Measures as outlined below. The level of funding, project scale, and eligible applicants vary under each Measure.

<b>Measure 1: Small Scale Repair/Development/Promotion and Marketing</b>
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**Grant Amount:** Up to €30,000

**Eligible Activities:** Small scale projects that are in line with the objectives and focus of the Scheme. This includes, but is not limited to, the upkeep, repair and development of trails, walkways, mountain access routes, cycleways, blueways recreational facilities at bogs, rivers, lakes and beaches, natural play areas that form part of a larger outdoor recreation project and the promotion and marketing of such infrastructure. Projects should, where possible, indicate how they are inclusive of people with disabilities and older adults.

Local authorities and local development companies must work with local communities to identify projects (evidence of this will be required) that enhance or redevelop existing amenities, or support new opportunities to develop local natural resources as referenced at section 2 above. There has also been a practice under this Measure of repeat funding requests for repair works on the same recreational infrastructure – the linkage with previous funding provided through ORIS should be clearly explained in the application form and such repeat applications may be assigned a lower priority in 2023 project selection.

**Eligible Applicants:** Local authorities, local development companies<sup>1</sup> and State bodies.

**Maximum Number of Projects:**

A maximum of 7 applications may be submitted per local authority.

A maximum of 3 applications may be submitted per local development company.

A maximum of 2 applications per State body.

**Indicative Project Completion Date:** All projects must be finished and drawdown of funding completed with 18 months of approval.

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<sup>1</sup> Local Development Companies as referenced under Section 128f(1)(d) of the Local Government Act 2001 (as amended by the Local Government Reform Act 2014) are designated eligible applicants under Measure 1 for this Scheme.

## Measure 2: Medium Scale Repair/Upgrade and New Trail/Amenity Development

**Grant Amounts:** Up to €200,000

**Eligible Activity:** Medium scale projects that are in line with the objectives and focus of the Scheme. This includes, but is not limited to, the development of new recreational infrastructure, extensions/upgrades to already established trails, walkways, mountain access routes, cycleways, blueways, water or cycle trails or other recreational facilities at bogs, rivers, lakes or beaches. Projects can also include works for the repair or promotion of such infrastructure.

In addition to alignment with *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors*, projects should indicate, where applicable, linkages with regional or national strategic initiatives, policies or plans e.g. Destination Experience Development Plans.

**Eligible Applicants:** Local authorities and State bodies.

**Maximum Number of Projects:**

A maximum of 3 applications may be submitted by each local authority. In order to maintain a balance between the maintenance of existing infrastructure and the development of new outdoor recreation amenities, a minimum of one application under Measure 2 should be for the development of new outdoor recreation infrastructure.

A maximum of 1 application may be submitted per State body.

**Indicative Project Completion Date:** All projects must be finished and drawdown of funding completed with 24 months of approval.

### Measure 3: Strategic Large Scale Repair/Upgrade and New Strategic Trail/Amenity Development

**Grant amounts:** Up to €500,000

**Eligible Activity:** Strategic large scale projects that are in line with the objectives and focus of the Scheme. This includes, but is not limited to, the development of new larger-scale recreational infrastructure, or resources to complete larger scale/longer term developments, as well as **significant** extensions/upgrades to already established trails, walkways, mountain access routes, cycleways, blueways, water or cycle trails or other recreational facilities at bogs, rivers, lakes or beaches.

In addition to alignment with *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors*, projects should indicate, where applicable, linkages with regional or national strategic initiatives, policies or plans e.g. Destination Experience Development Plans.

**Eligible Applicants:** Local Authorities and State Bodies

**Maximum Number of Projects:** Local Authorities and State Bodies will be confined to 1 application each under this Measure.

**Indicative Project Completion Date:** All projects must be finished and drawdown of funding completed with 24 months of approval.

## Project Development Measure: Development Costs for Strategic Large Scale Projects

**Grant amounts:** Up to €50,000

**Eligible Activity:** This Measure will provide funding for the detailed development of projects which would enable them to reach a standard for application under Measure 2 or 3 of ORIS. Such work might encompass detailed design, preparation for the planning and/or procurement, appropriate assessment etc.

The overall aim for the investment under this Measure should be for the development of projects that are of a scale that may be funded under a future Measure 2 or Measure 3 application, or developed in two phases under such Measures i.e. projects with an expected delivery cost of less than €1 million (that are in line with the objectives and focus of this Scheme).

The approval of an application under this Project Development Measure does not guarantee approval of funding for the subsequent delivery of the project. All project applications are subject to a competitive application process under future calls, regardless of any previous funding provided.

**Eligible Applicants:** Local authorities and State bodies.

**Maximum Number of Projects:**

Local authorities and State bodies will be limited 2 applications each under this Measure. However, local authorities with inhabited off-shore islands may submit one additional application under this Measure (max. 3 applications) which relates directly to a potential project on one of the inhabited off-shore islands.

Multiple applications for one project:

It is not permitted to apply under this Measure on multiple occasions in respect of the same project. Only one Project Development Measure will be awarded in respect of any given project.

**Indicative Project Completion Date:** All projects must be finished and drawdown of funding completed with 18 months of approval.



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## 4. Eligibility

### Eligible Projects

In the first instance all projects must align to [Embracing Ireland's Outdoors](#) - the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023-2027. The strategy considers outdoor recreation as activities that take place in the natural environment, such as walking, canoeing, mountain biking, orienteering and wild swimming. It precludes activities that take place outdoors on confined courses or pitches (such as golf, football, and show-jumping) or motorised activities (such as quads/scramblers).

### Eligible Applicants

Local authorities, local development companies and State bodies must work with local community/voluntary groups to identify projects. Local authorities, state bodies and local development companies are eligible for consideration under the appropriate measures as outlined in Chapter 3 (Scheme Measures). It should be noted that private commercial entities or bodies trading for profit are not eligible for funds under the scheme.

### Project Location

Projects located within any of the five main city boundaries (Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford) are not eligible under the scheme.

Projects should, in the main, be located in the countryside (i.e. not within the environs of towns or villages). However, ORIS will fund recreational infrastructure linking a town or village into the countryside, and particularly linking towns or villages to other outdoor recreation facilities located in the countryside. Given the emphasis on recreational amenities located near rivers, lakes and beaches, water based projects located within town environs are also eligible.

### Eligible Costs

All costs must be:

- Directly related to the construction of the project being applied for and as a result of an appropriate public procurement process.
- Incurred after project approval by DRCD and within the project delivery period.
- Verifiable by invoices and proof of payment.

## Ineligible Projects/Costs

The following types of projects and activities, in particular, will not be supported by the scheme:

- Greenways in excess of 20km
- Infrastructure for commercial activities
- Purchase/lease of land
- Legal fees
- Standalone outdoor gym/calisthenics workout area projects
- Sports grounds, traditional playgrounds and Multi-Use Gaming Areas (MUGAs)
- Works within Town Parks, marked street trails, walkways and cycleways within towns and villages except as outlined in *Project Location* above
- Surfacing works to public roads
- Refurbishment and construction of buildings<sup>2</sup> (except in very exceptional and limited circumstances for projects where this would substantially improve access to, and the utilisation of, recreational resources by the wider public)
- Walking or running tracks located in a confined space, e.g. around sports pitches or playgrounds, or within other sports grounds
- Maintenance works on elements of trails which form a normal part of the work undertaken as part of the Walks Scheme
- Works covered under the agreed work plans of the Walks Scheme
- Activities which do not comply with the definition of countryside/outdoor recreation as set out above and as defined in *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors*<sup>3</sup>.
- Capacity building or training
- Ongoing operational costs
- Costs not directly related to the project
- Indirect costs of the project e.g. community organisation staff time spent working on the project in an administrative capacity
- Organisation core costs, including overheads
- Retrospective costs - activity that has already been undertaken or costs incurred prior to date of project approval
- VAT where applicants are registered for VAT
- Charges such as bank interest costs, fines, financial penalties, and legal dispute costs
- Sponsorship and charitable donations
- Depreciation
- Notional costs e.g. lost opportunity

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<sup>2</sup> The relevant local authority should discuss any potential projects in this category with the Department before submitting an application.

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## 5. Grant Levels

### Grant aid

Up to 90% of the total cost of a project under the Scheme will be provided for any individual project. The remaining 10% match funding must be contributed by the successful applicant and/or the community group and/or philanthropic contributions.

### Cash Contribution

A minimum cash contribution of 5% of the overall project costs is required. The grantee will be required to provide confirmation that the cash contribution is in place and retain a record of the source of the cash contribution.

### Procurement and Value for Money

All projects must comply with the National Public Procurement Policy Framework [here](#) published by the Office of Government Procurement. The framework supports and enables Public Bodies, including local authorities and local development companies, to adopt procedures to meet their public procurement requirements and facilitates compliance with EU and National Procurement Rules.

Please note the threshold at which contracting authorities are required to advertise all contracts for goods and services on eTenders is now €50,000 (exclusive of VAT) following publication of [DPER Circular-05-2023 \(threshold change\)](#).

Failure to adhere to these requirements will result in the associated expenditure being deemed ineligible.

### Contribution in Kind & Voluntary Labour

Contributions in Kind, up to a maximum of 5% of project cost, can be provided in various forms including the provision of plant and equipment and/or voluntary labour etc. Grantee costs are excluded from this contribution.

Time or services 'donated' should be detailed on the prescribed voluntary labour timesheet, capped at €15 per/hour.

### Non Reckonable Contributions in Kind

The following is not reckonable as Contributions in Kind:

- Project administration e.g. attendance at meetings, preparation of grant application forms,

- Funding drawdown claims and management costs.
- Contributions which cannot be verified such as routine litter picking, ongoing maintenance, cleaning, security and undertaking research.
- Labour provided by a participant on a Rural Social Scheme/TÚS/other exchequer funded scheme.
- Donated Materials e.g. aggregate, cement. The value of materials contributed must be verifiable and vouched (e.g. by an invoice or statement from the body donating the material certifying both volume/quantity and market value of donation). For example, flowers donated to a project are not reckonable for in-kind contribution.
- Donated Plant e.g. tractor, trailer, concrete mixer etc. The completed voluntary timesheet captures the labour value attributable to donated plant. No contribution is attributable to donated plant.

### Staff Costs

The default position is that works undertaken will be subject to a separate competitive tender process or involve drawdown of a contract under an existing framework agreement. Where work is proposed to be undertaken in-house by the Grantee e.g. project management costs, self-delivery of works etc. a breakdown of these costs must be included in the application form and a rationale provided for same.

If staff costs are included, they must be proportionate to the overall cost of the project. Only salary costs in respect of time spent directly on the project shall be deemed eligible. Travel and subsistence, allowances etc. are not considered an eligible cost. The proposed level of costs will be assessed at application stage.

In addition, the reasonableness of the cost must be verified by the Grantee i.e. there must be evidence on file that the cost charged is in line with, or less than, the cost of engaging an external contractor. This will be reviewed at project inspection stage. Failure to have this on file could deem the amount charged ineligible.

### Professional Fees

In recognition that some projects are delivered in sensitive areas e.g. ecological or archaeological, the threshold for professional fees has been removed but must be at a **reasonable level** and this would be detailed in the application form. The Grantee staff costs as referenced above and that relate to project development, supervision etc. should also be included as part of this calculation.

### **Charging for Use**

The default position is that the infrastructure funded under ORIS should be available free of charge to the public. In limited instances where a modest charge is proposed, this has to be agreed with the Department **in advance of application**. Failure to secure this agreement will be considered to breach the applicable funding agreement. Please note that infrastructure for commercial activities are not eligible under the Scheme.

### **Delays with Project Delivery**

It should be noted that the 2023 allocation of approved projects may be reduced for any applicant should there be excessive delays in the projects already approved under previous iterations of this Scheme.

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## 6. Funding and Timelines

An indicative budget of €16 million is available for successful projects under the 2023 Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme. Funding will be provided under four different categories of projects (Measures) based on the size of the investment requirement.

All Measures must be capable of being delivered in a realistic timeframe i.e. within an **18 month** timeframe for Measure 1 & the Project Development Measure, or a **24 month** timeframe for Measure 2 & 3.

Eligible applicants must submit applications on the template application forms provided by the Department. Completed applications must be submitted via email to [ORIS@drcd.gov.ie](mailto:ORIS@drcd.gov.ie) by:

Measure	Application Deadline Date	Approval Date (Indicative)	Timeline for Project Completion
Measure 1	5:15 p.m. on 5 <sup>th</sup> September	Qtr. 1 2024	18 months
Measure 2	5:15 p.m. on 27 <sup>th</sup> October	Qtr. 1 2024	24 months
Measure 3	5:15 p.m. on 27 <sup>th</sup> October	Qtr. 1 2024	24 months
Project Development Measure	5:15 p.m. on 28 <sup>th</sup> July	September 2023	18 months

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## 7. Application Format

### Expressions of Interest

Local authorities and local development companies must seek Expressions of Interest (EOI) from local community groups to identify projects that enhance or redevelop existing amenities, or support new opportunities to develop local natural resources.

As in previous years, each local authority and local development company must submit an “Application Overview” spreadsheet detailing projects successful at the local screening stage for further consideration by the Department. This overview should prioritise projects and provide a short rationale for same. Project application forms (MS Word) in respect of each prioritised project must also be submitted.

In 2023, each local authority and local development company must also submit a list of the other projects which responded to the Expression of Interest call, but which were not prioritised at local screening stage. This will bring ORIS in line with other schemes funded by DRCD and permit the Department to gauge demand under the Scheme.

### Applications

As per above, an application form (MS Word) must be submitted in respect of each prioritised project. Applicants are required to supplement the applications with maps and/or photographs showing the location of the projects (please specify coordinates). Applicants are encouraged to specify relevant linkages with other outdoor infrastructure in surrounding areas.

The Department may not be in a position to follow up regarding missing documentation or incomplete application forms. The Department may exclude applications that do not include all relevant documentation or assurances at the time of submission.

It should be noted that projects applications that were previously unsuccessful under ORIS may be submitted for consideration under the 2023 scheme.

### Project Splitting

Projects must be standalone and operational in their own right with the exception of the Project Development Measure.

It is not acceptable to divide the same project into a number of separate applications in the one year with the effect of overcoming the maximum funding limits under each Measure e.g. submitting different parts of the same project under both Measure 2 & 3, or under two applications under Measure 1. Artificially splitting projects may breach procedures under the Capital Works Management Framework.

In addition, where a single project application involves more than one type of intervention, there should be a clear link between the interventions e.g. located in same area and linked or for multiple trail upgrades.

### **New Phases of Existing Projects**

New phases of existing projects under ORIS will also be eligible for consideration provided that there has been satisfactory progress with the phases previously funded. However, where the infrastructure e.g. a trail is of a significant scale that would require funding under ORIS for more than 3 phases, consideration should be given to applying under alternative funding streams that are designed for projects of significant scale e.g. RRDF.

### **Sign-off on Applications**

Local authority applications must be signed by the relevant Director of Services. Local development company applications must be signed by the CEO. Applications from State body must be signed at Director level or equivalent.



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## 8. Project Assessment

### Competitive Assessment

Selection of projects under the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme for 2023 will be by means of a competitive process based on applications received and the criteria outlined below. Final project selection will be made by the Department of Rural and Community Development, in consultation with both Fáilte Ireland and Sport Ireland, as appropriate.

Applicants are advised to take note of the relevant Assessment Criteria when completing applications. In approving applications and selecting the successful projects, a number of factors will be considered by the Department, including the information supplied in the Application Overview and Application Form; the range, mix, quality and impact of proposed projects; previous funding provided; any prioritisation of projects indicated by the applicants; inclusion of different population groups including people with disabilities and older adults; and other relevant considerations.

It should be noted that the allocation of approval for projects may be reduced for any applicant should there be excessive delays in the projects already approved under previous iterations of this Scheme.

Extra consideration will be given toward projects which are part of a broader, more strategic, plan for an area. Examples of this may include-

- Projects which meet an objective arising from *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors*.
- Projects which are engaging in a Destination Experience Development Plan process with Fáilte Ireland.
- Projects which form part of a coherent, integrated local plan agreed in respect of an area e.g. a County Outdoor Recreation Plan.

Guidance on the criteria that the Department may refer to during the ORIS assessment process are provided below. The level of response deemed necessary to address these criteria will increase in line with the amount of funding sought.

### Measure 1 Assessment Considerations:

• Does the project meet an objective of <i>Embracing Ireland's Outdoors</i> ?
• Does the project align with the Climate Action Plan and is it project environmentally sustainable/does it include a biodiversity element?
• Are all the necessary permissions and screening in place (e.g. planning, AA etc.)?
• Is there clear evidence of community engagement?
• Does the project clearly support outdoor recreation?
• Is the project collaborative in nature?
• Does the proposed project address an identified need?
• Are the timelines clearly set out in the application and realistically achievable?
• Are there clear and reasonable costings for the project?
• Does the project support an inclusive approach for people with disabilities or does it enhance the opportunities for people with disabilities?
• Does the project outcomes have clear positive health impacts or benefits for local communities?

### Measure 2 & 3 Assessment Considerations:

<b>Strategic and collaborative nature of the project</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the project meet an objective of <i>Embracing Ireland's Outdoors</i>?</li> <li>• Does the project align with the Climate Action Plan?</li> <li>• Is the project in a Destination Experience Development Plan process with Fáilte Ireland?</li> <li>• Is this part of a clear strategic plan e.g. a County Outdoor Recreation Plan?</li> <li>• Has the community been involved in the project development?</li> <li>• Is the application collaborative in nature?</li> <li>• Is there evidence that funding this project will have an impact at regional or national level?</li> </ul>
<b>Demonstration of need and potential impact of project</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the application set out a clear need for a project of this type?</li> <li>• Does the application demonstrate, or consider, any additional value-added that might arise from completion of this project?</li> <li>• Will the project be developed in line with best practice guidelines and with the least impact on the environment?</li> </ul>
<b>Value of the project for the local area</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the proposal add value to current infrastructure or address an existing deficit?</li> <li>• Does the project outcomes have clear positive health impacts or benefits for local communities?</li> <li>• Does the project outcomes have clear economic and/or tourism impacts?</li> <li>• Do the outcomes of the project demonstrate a sustainable and positive impact on the local area?</li> <li>• Is the project environmentally sustainable/does it include a biodiversity element?</li> <li>• Does the project support an inclusive approach for people with disabilities or does it enhance the opportunities?</li> </ul>

<p><b>Realistic nature, Value For Money of the proposal</b></p> <p><b>Quality of the application</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the project been the subject of funding under the Project Development Measure?</li> <li>• Is there evidence of the required permissions, screenings and approvals in place?</li> <li>• Are the costings for each element of the project clear and reasonable?</li> <li>• Is the project clearly set out in the application form?</li> <li>• Is the rationale for the project clearly laid out and extent to which it justifies the action?</li> <li>• Are the timelines for the project realistic?</li> </ul>
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**Project Development Measure Assessment Considerations:**

• Does the end project meet an objective of <i>Embracing Ireland's Outdoors</i> ?
• Is the project collaborative in nature?
• Does the proposed project address an identified need?
• Would the proposed end project be eligible under Measures 2 or 3?

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## 9. Funding Conditions for Rural Schemes.

All expenditure registered through the Department's Rural Schemes i.e. Town and Village Renewal Scheme, CLÁR, Outdoor Recreation and Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS) is subject to the terms of the Public Spending Code which can be found at <http://publicspendingcode.per.gov.ie/>.

All projects must comply with the National Public Procurement Policy Framework published by the Office of Government Procurement. The threshold at which contracting authorities are required to advertise all contracts for goods and services on eTenders is now €50,000 (exclusive of VAT) following publication of [DPER Circular-05-2023 \(threshold change\)](#).

In addition to this, the requirements outlined below will apply to all funding approved through those schemes. The need for adherence to all of the requirements will be reflected in the contractual agreement between the Department of Rural and Community Development and the grantee approved for funding under the scheme.

1. Projects will be expected to commence and be completed in line with the timelines set out in the relevant Scheme Outline.
2. The Department may de-commit funding allocated to projects under the Scheme where the project is not completed within the time specified, and where the express agreement of the Department to extend the funding arrangement has not been agreed in advance.
3. The grant funding for the approved project will be provided from the Department of Rural and Community Development's capital budget. Administration and/or professional costs associated with the proposed project, where allowed for in the Scheme Outline, should be kept to a minimum.
4. Where allowed in the relevant Scheme Outline, in-kind contributions, up to the maximum set out in relevant Scheme Outline, can be provided in the form of voluntary labour (i.e. unpaid work) which must be based on the verified time spent on the project.
  - a. The rate applied should be for remuneration of equivalent work, up to a maximum rate of €15 per hour. The grantee must ensure that the rate per hour applied is properly justified according to the work undertaken.
  - b. Where Voluntary Labour forms part of a project, the grantee is advised that the requirements of all relevant Health and Safety legislation apply.
  - c. Project administration e.g. attendance at meetings, preparation of grant application form, funding drawdown claims and management costs are not eligible as voluntary labour.
  - d. Labour provided by a participant on an RSS/TUS/other exchequer funded scheme are not eligible for use as an in-kind contribution.
  - e. Voluntary labour must be completed prior to submitting the final drawdown claim to the Department. It may be included in phased payments, provided the work in question has been completed at the time the claim is submitted.

- f. Details of all voluntary labour claimed must be maintained on a timesheet (1 timesheet per person) which will be provided by the Department. The time sheet will capture the following details;
  - The name of the person undertaking the work
  - The nature, time, dates of the works, quantity, hours worked and rate per hour,
  - The signature of the person who provided the in-kind work,
  - The timesheet must be signed off by the appointed project co-ordinator over the project.
5. A cash contribution as set out in the relevant Scheme Outline is required. The grantee will be required to provide confirmation that the cash contribution is in place and retain a record of the source of the cash contribution.
6. Projects must be completed in full in order to drawdown the full grant amount. Where it is established that a project has not been completed, the Department may request the grantee to repay any funding received on the project. Any changes to the proposed project must be advised and agreed with the Department in advance of the change being implemented.
7. Where an element of the approved project is not carried out as per the project application, grant funding may be reduced to reflect the amended project.
8. If the project involves large capital investment works on buildings or lands (not including trails) that are not in the ownership of the grantee, a minimum 15 year lease must be in place from date of project completion.
9. In the case of funding allocated to enterprises or facilities (i.e. community centre, hubs, vehicles), it is a requirement that they must operate as funded for a minimum of 5 years following release of the final stage of funding, otherwise funding may have to be repaid. Where they do not operate as funded this must be advised and agreed with the Department in advance.
10. All appropriate financial, Public Procurement and accounting rules and regulations must be complied with and each grantee will fully account for the funding received in a timely manner.
11. Full and accurate documentation to support all expenditure should be maintained and accessible by Department officials for audit purposes at all times and for a period of six years from the date of completion of the project.
12. Recipients will acknowledge the support of the Department of Rural and Community Development, Our Rural Future, Project Ireland 2040/Government of Ireland, (in relation to projects funded under ORIS) and any other applicable sources of funding (as identified in the relevant Funding Agreement) in all public announcements, advertising and signage, as appropriate, relating to the project. In addition, the Department may seek to use the project in the broader promotion of its policies.
13. All signage must comply with the Official Languages Acts 2003 and 2021 regarding the use of the Irish language, i.e. all text must be in Irish and English, or in Irish only. This applies

whether permanent or temporary, indoor or outdoor, directional or promotional, new or replacement signage, etc. Guidance in this regard is available from An Coimisinéir Teanga.

14. Grantees will provide any reports and information relating to the project as may reasonably be requested by the Department of Rural and Community Development from time to time.
15. On-going monitoring and evaluation of the project outputs and outcomes should take place in the context of assessing the impact of the project. Grantees will be expected to collect appropriate data to facilitate this learning on an on-going basis. On request, a brief report (1-2 pages) on the outputs and outcomes of the project funded should be completed and made available to the Department on the case study template.
16. Each grantee, will provide a contact point/points to the Department to facilitate payment and information requests. The Department should be updated on any changes to contact personnel in a timely manner.
17. A checklist confirming compliance with funding conditions relating to the grant aid will be required upon project completion.

**Non-Compliance with the conditions as outlined or any additional stipulations agreed during contract negotiations may result in a sanction being imposed or the requirement to refund part or all of the grant aid awarded.**

**Further conditions will form part of the Funding Agreement to be agreed in respect of each successful projects.**

**ORIS Specific Conditions:**

- Particular care should be taken with proposed works in designated areas, such as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Areas (SPA), etc. Any necessary screening for appropriate assessments and/or other ecological assessments /approvals/planning permissions etc. that may need to be obtained must be in place prior to any works commencing.
- Applicants should ensure that all necessary consents are forthcoming from all relevant landowners (private and public) for the proposed works, and that works, where applicable, comply with relevant standards set by Sport Ireland Trails, Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) or other relevant bodies.
- In the context of repair work on trails, the applicants must provide extracts from Sport Ireland Trails Inspection reports which confirm the need for such repairs. In the absence of a recent Sport Ireland Trails report, photographic evidence of the area requiring repairs may suffice.